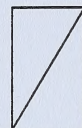
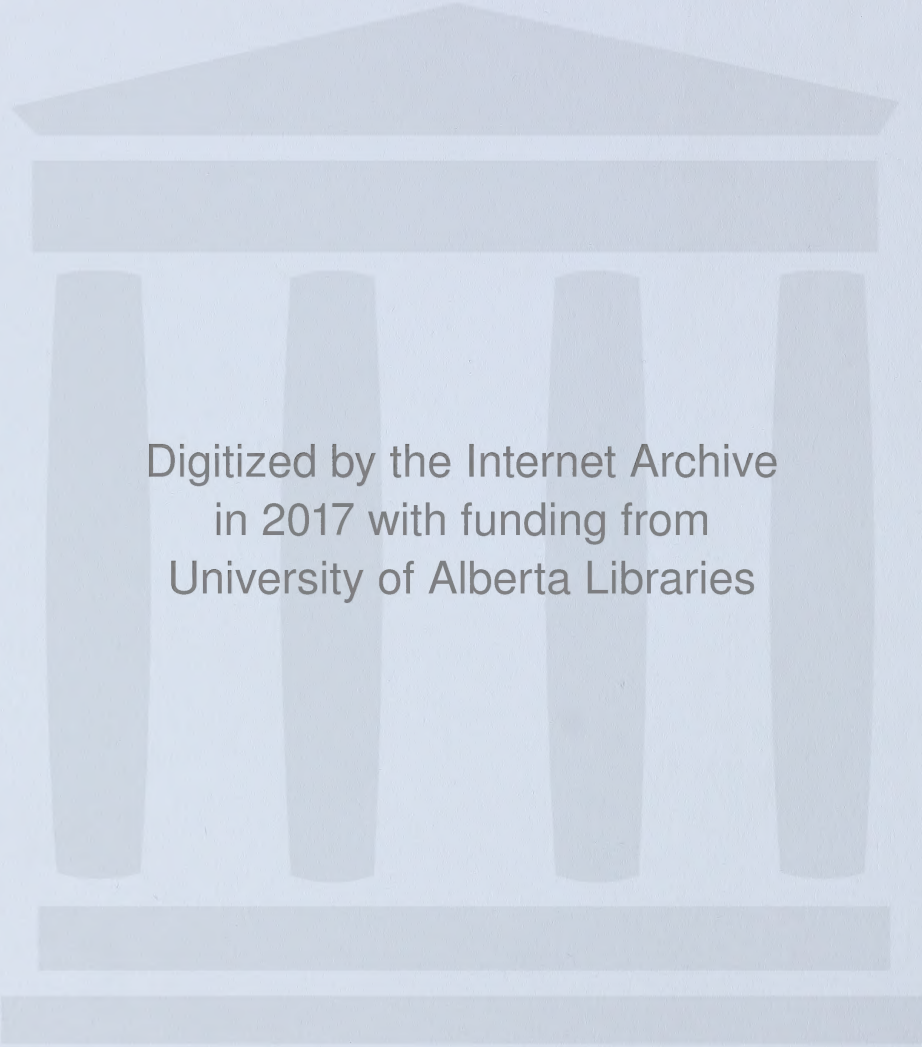


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A d v i s o r y C o u n c i l l o r s H a n d b o o k



Note This handbook is an introduction to the improvement district system in Alberta. It is meant to give a descriptive overview of improvement districts and their operation. It cannot be used as a substitute for the statutes that govern improvement districts and their operation. For specific information on the legislation, please refer to the actual statutes.



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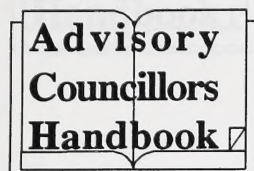


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CHAPTER 1 HISTORY

Improvement districts have been working to make life better for the residents of Alberta since before the province even existed. Created during the settlement of the Canadian prairies in the late nineteenth century, improvement districts were first established in 1887.

That year the new local improvement districts took over the job of building roads from statute labour districts. District residents had to build the roads themselves, but at least they could choose their own boss by electing an overseer to supervise the construction. Over the next few years, the districts became responsible for fighting fires and weeds, and residents began to meet once a year to discuss district matters. The territorial government also created the Local Improvement Branch to help the growing number of districts to run better.

At the same time the government created a new, larger form of local improvement district, more like present improvement districts. The territorial government took on the job of road building for the larger districts. Instead of working on the roads residents paid a \$2 tax on each parcel of land. By 1918, the smaller local improvement districts had been reorganized a number of times and given the powers to elect councillors and levy taxes. Eventually, they became what we know today as municipal districts.

The larger improvement districts have also changed a lot since the early 1900's. A part of the provincial government since 1905, improvement districts were amalgamated to become the size and shape they are today. In keeping pace with developments in local government, advisory councils, elections, municipal planning, and complex assessment and taxation systems have become a part of Alberta's improvement districts.

Since 1980, improvement districts and the province have been working together to increase the improvement districts' sense of self-reliance and local responsibility. Improvement districts are becoming more and more like incorporated municipalities. The highlight of this development was the passing of the *Rural Districts Act* in 1991.

The *Rural Districts Act* creates a transitional form of government called a rural district to help improvement districts become municipal districts. The transition will reduce some of the shock experienced in the past when improvement districts became incorporated municipalities. The process allows improvement districts to take over the responsibilities of a municipality as they feel able.

CHAPTER 2

IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

A vital part of the smooth operation of local government is the interaction between the council and the administration. Understanding how the improvement district administration works will help you carry out your role as an advisory councillor.

Improvement districts are set up and run differently from other municipalities. They are different because the *Improvement Districts Act* says the Minister of Municipal Affairs is legally responsible for improvement districts. The elected councils are legally responsible for incorporated municipalities. The entire system for operating improvement districts is based on the fact the minister is responsible for running improvement districts. This chapter describes the role everyone plays in the improvement district system.

The Minister

The Minister of Municipal Affairs became responsible for the districts in 1912 when the Department of Municipal Affairs was created. Today, the minister, through the advisory councils, provides municipal services to a large part of Alberta.

Actually running all of the improvement districts would mean a lot of day-to-day decision-making for the minister: appointing board members, approving agreements and contracts, and approving budgets and expenditures. With 18 improvement districts in the province, this would be an overwhelming task for just one person.

Fortunately in the eyes of the law, the minister can be more than one person for the purpose of getting things done. The minister delegates the authority for these tasks to provincial government employees or the advisory councils. For example, the minister delegates the authority to approve expenditures and contracts up of certain amounts of money to different levels of employees involved in the administration of improvement districts. The authority to appoint committees of council is delegated to the advisory councils. When a provincial employee or advisory council does something delegated to them by the minister, it is done by the minister in the eyes of the law.

Improvement District Administration

Helping the minister with the day-to-day operation of all the districts is the job of Improvement District Administration. The following describes how each area of Improvement District Administration works.

Your improvement district office, along with all other improvement district offices and the office in Edmonton, is a part of Improvement District Administration, Municipal Affairs. The goals of Municipal Affairs are to:

- Provide municipal services and meet all local government needs for improvement districts
- Help improvement districts achieve municipal incorporation wherever possible.

Improvement district offices

Located in your improvement district, these offices take care of the everyday work of running a local government. This includes providing a variety of programs and services depending on the priorities you set for the improvement district. It can include water and sewer services, recreation programs, as well as the day-to-day financial and administrative duties required to run a local government.

As an advisory councillor, residents will ask you for information on the improvement district's programs and services, so you will need to know the responsibilities of each employee. Your most important contact is the improvement district manager. Responsible for the local administration of your improvement district, the manager can tell you what services the district provides, and how, or simply why things are done the way they are.

Improvement District Administration office

The office in Edmonton provides a range of advisory and administrative services to all improvement districts. These include help with assessment and taxation, budgeting, policy development and contract administration. This office also organizes the flow of paperwork between the minister and the improvement districts, including ministerial orders and contracts.

How decisions are made

The minister used to be responsible for all decisions made by an improvement district, but many of the decisions needed to run a district have been delegated to your advisory council. Even with decisions the minister is still responsible for, the minister relies on the recommendations of the advisory councils. This system has created some unique ways of getting things done. You need to know how things are done to understand how an advisory council works with its administration to provide programs and services for residents.

Resolutions

Advisory councils make decisions by resolving to do something or by making a recommendation to the minister. The first action, a council resolution, can be made only when the minister has delegated the responsibility for a decision to council. A council resolution goes into effect when council passes it at a council meeting.

The second action, a recommending resolution, is used for matters where the minister is still responsible for a decision. Once council has made a recommending resolution, it is sent to the office in Edmonton by the improvement district manager. The minister accepts the recommendation of an advisory council if the laws allow and it is based on the needs and priorities of the whole improvement district.

The next two chapters have some useful information on how local governments make good decisions.

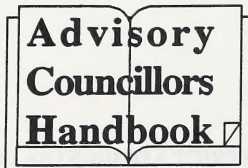
Ministerial orders

Ministerial orders are used for a number of purposes. Many of the resolutions mentioned above are made official by a ministerial order. Ministerial orders are also used like bylaws. Where a municipality has the power to pass a bylaw under the *Municipal Government Act*, the minister may approve a ministerial order for an improvement district.

The improvement district prepares a “bylaw” and recommends it to the minister for adoption as a ministerial order. If the “bylaw” meets the requirements of the legislation, it is adopted as a ministerial order and becomes law for your improvement district. These “bylaws”

have the same force as any provincial or federal law, but can only apply to your improvement district.

These are the basic means of decision making for improvement districts. From information in the rest of this manual and time spent on council, you will become more familiar with the hows and whys of your local government.



CHAPTER 3

WORKING AS AN ADVISORY COUNCILLOR

Introduction

Your election and appointment to the advisory council is like taking on a second job. You are not on the improvement district staff and you don't get paid for your work, but being an advisory councillor involves responsibilities and rules that come with a new job. The big difference with being an advisory councillor is you have up to several hundred bosses, not just one.

There is a way of going about the work of an advisory councillor to make sure it is done the best way possible. The following are some of the tried and true ways to be an effective councillor.

The entire improvement district

The voters of one electoral division elected you, but you are on council to look after the interests of the entire improvement district. Your understanding of your area's needs is valuable when an advisory council looks at an issue, but don't let this understanding cloud your judgment when it comes to making a decision. As tough as it may be at times, you must base any decision you make on what is best for the entire district. The team ideal, so vital to the development of an effective advisory council, depends on you providing input as a representative of your area while thinking and voting for the whole district.

The team

Working with the rest of the advisory council and the administration as part of a team will make a success of your time on council. It isn't always going to be easy! Sometimes being a part of the team will mean swallowing a little pride to allow everything to run smoothly. Just remember, a smooth running council is the best way to get things done, and that is why the voters elected you.

When an issue is being studied be sure to express your views as a part of the debate. Free exchange of ideas and views makes for good decisions, but limit the exchange to the issue. Personal attacks have no place on an advisory council and are a sure way to prevent your council from accomplishing its goals.

Once the advisory council makes a decision, like it or not, it becomes your decision. In a show of support for the team, you should not

question the decision in public. If asked about the issue, simply explain why the advisory council made the decision it did.

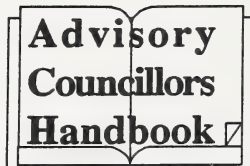
The residents of your electoral division elected you to get results. Working as a team player and doing your part to reduce conflict on the advisory council is the best way to achieve positive results in local government.

Time

Being an advisory councillor takes up a lot of your time. There are council meetings, committee meetings, public meetings, and the two Rural and Improvement Districts Association of Alberta (RIDAA) conferences each year. To participate effectively in all these meetings you must prepare and become familiar with the issues. This means staying up to date on the minutes from various meetings and all types of reports.

On top of the time you must spend on your duties, your most important time is the time spent on the phone or visiting, or being visited by your constituents. Listening and following up on their concerns, attending community meetings and events to talk with people will take time. But it's why they elected you!

Chapter 4 has more information on working as an advisory councillor.



CHAPTER 4

YOUR ROLE AS ADVISORY COUNCILLOR

Introduction

The job of advisory councillor requires you to take on two roles. You must be a policy maker and a program monitor. How you work and make decisions in these two roles takes on two forms, representation and leadership.

Representation and leadership

Representation and leadership are the two sides of the decision making coin. Representation means presenting the views and feelings of your constituents in council meetings. Leadership means using the knowledge you gain from your work with the improvement district to inform residents of issues they should be aware of and to make informed decisions based on what you believe is best for your improvement district.

While political skill and knowledge will give you insight on when to represent and when to lead, the following guidelines will always apply.

Elected to represent

You were elected because the voters felt you would do the best job of representing to council their feelings on the issues facing the improvement district. If you fail to keep up with those expectations, you will probably find out about it in the next election.

Inform the voters

It seems straightforward enough, but being a councillor means more than simply echoing your voters' sentiments on any given issue. Sometimes voters are not aware of all the important issues facing the district or are not interested in what is best for the entire district. More often the voters are not aware of all the facts on a particular issue. When any of these situations arises, it is your job to inform the voters of the issue and the important facts. It is also your job to make a decision based on all the information and, as mentioned before, on what is best for the entire district. When you do so, you are showing leadership.

A careful balance

Leadership and representation are a careful balance, and good government depends on you keeping the balance.

Policy making and
program monitoring

The advisory council is responsible for helping the minister to make sure the improvement district is providing the services the residents need and want. This responsibility involves providing input into the creation of the district's programs and services (policy making) and making sure the administration provides the programs and services the best way possible (monitoring). While policy making often receives the most attention, both roles are equally important.

Policy

There is no mystery to the word policy. A policy is simply a way of making consistent decisions on a particular matter. If an improvement district had no policies, each day it would have to decide to collect garbage as well as how, when and where to collect garbage. Instead, an improvement district sets policies on garbage collection. All decisions follow the policy and remain consistent until the district decides to change the policy.

This doesn't mean council has to set policies for every thing the improvement district does. Council doesn't have time to make all these decisions, so the term policy is saved for the general guidelines council sets for the administration to follow. The administration then provides programs and services to residents according to the policies set by council.

"The term policy is
saved for the general
guidelines council sets
for the administration
to follow."

There are limits to the types of policies an improvement district can make. The *Improvement Districts Act*, the *Municipal Government Act* and other provincial and federal laws affect your district's policies. This handbook talks about some of these legal restrictions in later sections. The best and closest source of information on this is your improvement district manager.

Creating budgets and land use plans may be the glamour work of an advisory council, but program monitoring is what keeps things running. You must back up good policies with a way of making sure the administration carries out the programs and services so they meet the needs of the residents.

Program monitoring

“Program monitoring means keeping an eye on what the district’s programs and services are doing for the residents and comparing the results to what you hoped to achieve.”

This means staying up to date on the programs and services the improvement district provides. Advisory councillors don’t get involved with the administration of the district nor do they review every decision made by the administration. Neither you nor the administration has the time, and local government depends on council and the administration staying out of each other’s way.

Staying out of the day-to-day operation of the district allows you to concentrate on your policy making and program monitoring duties. Work with the improvement district manager to keep informed on what the district is doing, and you will get a feel for how important the monitoring role is to good local government. You will depend on the administration and especially the improvement district manager to provide you with the information to make good decisions.

CHAPTER 5

COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Introduction

As an advisory councillor you will be asked to make decisions and carry out duties and functions on a wide variety of local government matters. To help make the job easier, your improvement district has a number of boards and committees to help spread the work load. Committees and boards work differently, and each committee and board will have different duties and responsibilities. This section will give a general description of how boards and committees should work.

Committees

The advisory council creates committees and appoints all committee members. Council may decide to create a temporary committee just to look at a specific issue. There may also be standing committees. These committees run from year to year dealing with ongoing issues like finances or recreation. Council appoints the members of standing committees at its annual organizational meeting.

The advisory council is in complete control of its committees, from creating and terminating them to the appointment of members. The advisory council assigns a committee its responsibilities and powers. This can include delegating any of the powers given to council by the minister and the power to make recommendations to the minister.

Boards and commissions

Boards and commissions are created by provincial legislation, not by council. This makes them different from committees. A board is legally separate from the advisory council. The two boards you will become most familiar with are the agricultural service board and the development appeal board. Most improvement districts also have municipal and regional planning commissions.

The minister appoints board members based on a recommendation from the advisory council. Council does not have the ability to start or terminate a board because a board is governed by provincial law. The activities, responsibilities and powers of the board are also defined by the legislation. The powers and responsibilities of a board are different from council. This is necessary for the board to carry out the duties placed on them by the legislation.

CHAPTER 6

IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT FINANCE

Introduction

Money makes the improvement district's world go around. Almost everything you do has a cost attached to it, and you will spend a lot of time on council making money decisions. When making those decisions, your role as a public trustee is to take care of the rate-payer's money.

Advisory councillors have two functions in the improvement district finance system. You decide where the district's money goes by setting the budget each year, your policy making role. Then you check to make sure the money is doing what you wanted it to do by keeping track of the financial information prepared by the administration, your program monitoring role. Knowing some of the principles behind improvement district finances will help you participate in this important part of your district's operations.

Budgeting

At the centre of the municipal finance system is the budget. Through the budget, you decide the improvement district's priorities for the next year by setting aside money in the budget for each program and service. The improvement district budget is the most important decision you and the rest of council make each year.

The budget touches every part of your district's operation. Careful budget planning and good budget control mean better services for district residents. Your role, as a part of council, in the budget process includes:

- Setting overall goals and objectives for the district (policy making),
- Allocating the district's resources (staff and money) to meet the goals and objectives (policy making), and
- Monitoring the operations and programs to make sure they are cost effective and doing what you want them to (program monitoring).

The budget itself has two parts, operating and capital.

The operating budget

The operating budget is a detailed estimate of how much your district needs to spend to meet its financial obligations and provide programs and services to district residents.

Some of the financial obligations might be:

- Repaying any debt the district might have,
- Paying requisitions to other authorities (school and hospital boards), and
- Paying out the terms of a contract during the year.

Providing programs and services includes:

- Running the administration, and
- Running planned programs and services for the district.

The operating budget also includes revenues

Put together these add up to the money your district needs to run for the next year. The next step in the budget process is to estimate all the revenues the district will receive except those from property taxes. These include local improvement levies, grants, utility charges, and money from investments. The difference between how much your improvement district needs to run for the next year and your estimated revenues is what you need to raise through the district's property tax. See Chapter seven for more information on taxation.

The capital budget

The capital budget is money set aside for buying or building fixed assets like

- Land,
- Buildings,
- Water and sewer facilities, and
- Major equipment.

These are expensive items the district will need and use for a

number of years. Council must plan the purchase of these assets well ahead and, for the very expensive items, set aside money over a number of years in a capital reserve.

Five years is a good time period for advance capital budget planning. Once council chooses the planning period, you look at the existing capital assets and develop a capital expenditure plan. The plan sets out

- What capital expenditures are needed (new assets or replacement of assets),
- When each is needed. Setting priorities on when assets are needed, and
- How the assets will be purchased. Create an annual capital financial plan so money is available when needed.

You have a lot of flexibility in setting up your capital budget plan. This flexibility includes a number of ways to pay for capital purchases:

- Taxes,
- Money from selling other assets,
- Money set aside in capital reserve funds,
- Utility payments and other user fees,
- Development agreements,
- Donations and government grants, and
- Sale of debentures.¹

Finally, when planning the purchase or construction of an asset, especially a building, you must take into account the future cost of maintaining the asset once it has been built or purchased. Maintenance is an annual expenditure the district must be able to pay for over the lifetime of the asset.

The budget cycle

The improvement district budgeting process has two parts, an interim budget and a final budget. The interim budget guides your district's financial decisions until all the information from the previous year is finalized and you can set a tax rate. Setting the tax rate is one of the most important parts of the budget process.

¹An improvement district sells a debenture to raise money. A debenture is a loan based on the district's ability to raise money from its tax base.

The interim budget

Most of your work goes into preparing the interim budget. This starts in September and finishes with the approval of the interim budget by December 31. This budget allows your district to request the funds needed for your operating fund reserve. The operating fund reserve allows your district to pay the bills and other financial obligations (school board requisitions) until the tax revenues arrive later in the year.

The final budget

In March, the administration completes the previous year's financial statements and draws an actual picture of your district's finances. This includes going back and fine tuning the interim budget. With all the budget information available, you can now set the tax rate. This is done by calculating the difference between revenues and expenditures for the year. The difference is how much money you must raise through property taxes. The final budget becomes official when it is approved by the minister.

Monitoring the budget

The budget is a plan of your expenditures and revenues over the course of the year. Council needs to keep a constant eye on what is actually happening to make sure it matches the budget. You should receive financial reports from your administration on a regular basis. Financial reports are a good source of information and keep everyone interested in budget control. Watch the revenues as well as the expenditures.

Improvement districts don't receive revenues or make expenditures in equal monthly amounts. You will receive a lot of revenue around the due dates for taxes and licence renewals and in May when you receive the Alberta Partnership Transfer program grant. You will make large payments when the school and hospital boards submit their requisitions.

Watch your cash flow

Watching your cash flow is important for making sure your district's operating reserve is sufficient to carry you through to tax collection time. Budget control is also important for the capital budget. In this case council should receive regular status reports from the administration on each capital project.

CHAPTER 7

TAXES AND OTHER REVENUES

Introduction

The main source of tax revenue for improvement districts is property tax. The *Municipal Taxation Act* governs how improvement districts tax property. Taxing property is two step process. The first step, assessment, determines the value of the property. The second step, mill rate, determines the taxes an owner must pay based on their assessment.

Assessment

Assessment is when a person's property and the buildings or other improvements on the property are given a value. The value, the assessment, is set at a percent of the market value. The assessment multiplied by the mill rate determines the amount of taxes a person pays.

While a general assessment is usually done every seven years, the district adopts the assessment roll, a listing of all property, each year. Residents can compare other assessments to their own for 30 days following the mailing of assessment notices. If a resident thinks their assessment is unfair in relation to other properties in the community, or is faulty in other ways, they can complain to the court of revision to have their assessment reviewed.

The court of revision

The court of revision is a board, usually made up of councillors, that reviews complaints about assessments. The court can ask the assessor to make changes to the assessment if they feel it is unfair. The board cannot set or change tax rates. While taxes and assessment are related, a person cannot complain to the court of revision about taxes, only about assessment. If the person is not satisfied with the decision of the court of revision, they can make an appeal to the Alberta Assessment Appeal Board. A decision by the Alberta Assessment Appeal Board is final.

Mill rate

Once a council estimates the expenditures and revenues for the next year, they can decide on a tax rate for property tax, the mill rate. The amount of the property taxes on an individual's property is the result of applying the mill rate to the assessment. Technically, one mill is .1

percent, so one mill on \$1,000 worth of assessment produces one dollar of tax revenue. For a resident with property assessed at \$100,000 must pay \$100 for each mill in the tax rate.

You can see how your budget decisions affect an individual's property tax. You can only recommend a mill rate to the minister once each year. Once the minister has set the mill rate and the tax notices are mailed, you can't change the mill rate. It's important to do it right the first time!

Hospital and school districts

Improvement district taxes and mill rates are not the only things you will be involved in at budget time. Improvement districts are responsible for collecting taxes for school and hospital districts. The hospital and school district tell you how much money they need for the next year. This amount is added to the municipal taxes, and the total is what appears on the tax statement sent to the rate-payers.

Equalized assessment

One other term you will encounter is equalized assessment. Each year the Alberta Assessment Equalization Board figures out the equalized assessment for each municipality by calculating the assessment values, no matter when the assessment was done, to a common base. Equalized assessment is needed because municipal assessments are done at different times. If your improvement district hasn't had a general assessment for a few years, all sorts of factors have since influenced the value of the property. Your improvement district's actual assessment is based on old market values, building costs, and legislation, so the equalization procedure converts all assessments, no matter how outdated, to a common base.

This is important because equalized assessment is used to decide your district's share of cost-shared programs. The law also requires the use of equalized assessment for the allocation of school, hospital and nursing home requisitions. The regional planning fund and school foundation program fund requisitions are also based on the equalized assessment.

Other revenues

Council should not overlook the other sources of revenue available to the district. User fees of one type or another are the most common. These fees are set by a ministerial order based on a recommendation from your advisory council.

Utility charges for water, sanitary sewage treatment and any other utilities you operate are the most common user fees. If you are asked to set the rate for any one of these fees, you must decide how much of the district's costs you want to recover through user fees. The authority for setting rates is found in the *Municipal Government Act*.

The council can also charge for garbage collection, issuing various licenses and permits, and set the user fees for recreational facilities such as swimming pools, arenas and so on. These are often sensitive matters to decide. You might want to have a recreation fee policy in your policy manual to set the percentage of the anticipated operating costs you want to recover through user fees.

"Set the fees for long-term uses carefully."

The municipality can lease or rent property it owns. Set the fees for long-term uses carefully. When setting the fees for temporary uses, such as a meeting room, you might want to consider flexible rates depending on the use involved.

The minister also has the power to set various penalties for residents who do not pay their taxes or user fees. The penalties must be recommended to the minister by the advisory council and stay within the limits described in legislation.

Grants

Another major source of non-tax revenue is grants from other governments. Your municipality will automatically receive the Alberta Partnership Transfer (APT) grant and the Municipal Debenture Interest Rebate for eligible debentures. The Alberta Partnership Transfer grant is a combination of a number of grants from the province. Most of the Alberta Partnership Transfer is made up of the Municipal Assistance Grant from Municipal Affairs. Your improvement district manager has a complete list of grants your improvement district can get.

FS3

Page FS3 of your annual financial statement summarizes the revenues, expenditures and the taxes your improvement district collects. It is a valuable resource reviewing your council's policies and looking at how your property tax dollars are actually used. Ask your manager to give you a copy.

CHAPTER 8

LAND USE PLANNING

Introduction

Municipalities throughout Alberta spend a lot of time and energy on land use planning. Why? Because it is the best way to co-ordinate the growth, development or changes in an area to meet the community's needs and goals. For this reason, you will spend much of your council term dealing with land use planning and community development matters.

What exactly is land use planning? It is many things, but more than any other, land use planning is about controlling development. Development is the construction of a building, renovation of or addition to a building, an excavation, a change in the use of a piece of land (farm to a golf course) or even a change in the intensity of use of a piece of land. Land use planning is about controlling these changes so they benefit the community.

The *Planning Act* and other provincial legislation govern and provide direction for your local land use planning activities. You don't need to know all the ins and outs of this legislation, but knowing some of the terms will make your introduction to planning easier. This section describes the most important terms you will need to know to understand land use planning in improvement districts.

Finally, to make good decisions on planning issues you need access to copies of the local plans. Your improvement district office should have copies of all local plans. The most important of these planning documents is the land use order.

The plans

The regional plan

Most improvement districts are part of a regional planning commission. Each commission has a regional plan. This plan is the general framework for planning over the entire region.

This planning document doesn't deal with specifics. It gives general directions to local plans and helps plan land uses significant to the whole region like transportation corridors or river valleys.

If you are a councillor in Improvement Districts 18 and 17 East, you don't deal with regional planning commissions. Planning Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs, helps you with your planning.

The general municipal plan
(GMP)

The Planning Act does not require an improvement district to have a general municipal plan, but yours may have one anyway. The general municipal plan sets out the basic beliefs and policies for guiding your district's development. It usually includes:

- A physical description of the community and its past development,
- Population trends, a description of the economy, and existing and future land uses, and
- A map of current and future land uses as well as community facilities and utilities.

The public must have a chance to comment on a proposed general municipal plan. Once they have, you and the rest of council can recommend the plan and any policies it contains to the minister for approval.

Your council and those of neighbouring municipalities or urban municipalities within the improvement district may have a joint general municipal plan. Including the same kind of information as a general municipal plan, a joint plan can set policies for land important to both you and your neighbour.

Land use order

Passed as a ministerial order on the recommendation of the advisory council, the land use order is a detailed guide for the development decisions your improvement district must make. The land use order is not a plan like the previous two, it is how council controls development in your community. Based on the policies established in the first two plans, the land use order will:

- Divide up your district into areas and lists what can be built on the land and what the land can be used for in each area,
- Set development standards, such as building setback requirements,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a development permit system. The permit system allows your improvement district to control construction and land development so it meets the land uses and development standards for the area, • Set up the position of development officer. The development officer is responsible for reviewing development permit applications, making sure the development meets the requirements of the land use order and issuing development permits, and • Set up the roles and responsibilities of a municipal planning commission.
The area structure plan	<p>Your improvement district may also have some area structure plans. Designed to set planning policy for a specific area in the improvement district, area structure plans are often used for planning development in hamlets.</p>
Processes	
Subdivision	<p>Subdivision is dividing a piece of land into smaller parcels to create separate title to each of the smaller parcels. An important part of land development, subdivision is controlled with the help of the <i>Planning Act</i>, the subdivision regulations and the land use order.</p>
Subdivision approval	<p>To make sure subdivision proposals meet the land use plans for your area, they must be approved by the subdivision approving authority (SAA) for your district. The SAA makes sure the proposed subdivision fits in with the overall environment of the area. The regional planning commission or, in the case of improvement districts 17 East and 18, Alberta Municipal Affairs, is the SAA. The SAA will ask the council or the municipal planning commission to comment on subdivision applications for your area before making a decision.</p>
Land use district	<p>The land use order divides the improvement district into land use districts and establishes all the “permitted” and “discretionary” uses for each land use district.</p>

Development permit	Any “development”, such as construction of a building, excavation of land, a change in the use of the land, or a change in intensity of the use, must be authorized by the improvement district. The development officer does this by issuing a development permit. The development can only be authorized if it meets the requirements of either a permitted or a discretionary use for the land use district.
Permitted use	To be a permitted use a development must meet all land use order requirements and the requirements of the <i>Planning Act</i> . The development officer must give the applicant a development permit for permitted uses.
Discretionary use	<p>If a development is a discretionary use for its land district, a development permit may be issued by the municipal planning commission or the development officer. Usually, the decision is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The merits of the proposed development, • How it fits into the overall environment of the area, and • Its compatibility with existing and future land uses.
Development officer	<p>The person the improvement district can appoint to look at development permit applications and to issue permits for developments that meet the land use order’s standards for the area. The development officer first decides if the application is for a permitted or discretionary use. If it is a permitted use a development permit is issued. If it is a discretionary use the development officer must decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a permit should be issued, and • What, if any, conditions should be applied to the development.

Planning agencies

Municipal planning commission (MPC)

Made up of councillors and residents, an MPC helps council deal with the day-to-day administration needed for effective planning. Your MPC can get involved in many planning areas, but mainly works on

- Development decisions An MPC can act as a development officer. If so, it makes decisions on applications for development permits by following the same review procedure as a development officer.
- Planning advice The MPC advises the council on planning issues. Members of the MPC have the time and background to look at the issues carefully and help council make good planning decisions when creating and changing land use orders and subdividing land. Council can also delegate the power to make these decisions to the MPC.

Development appeal board (DAB)

Your improvement district has a development appeal board. The DAB hears appeals on development permit applications. Appeals are usually made by someone who has applied for a development permit and been turned down, or people who are affected by a development officer or MPC's decision. What decisions a DAB can make and how it makes those decisions is governed by the *Planning Act*.

Regional planning commissions

Unless you are a councillor for improvement district 18 or 17 East, your improvement district is a member of a regional planning commission. The commission is there to help you with your land use planning, especially:

- Preparing regional plans,
- General municipal plans,
- Land use orders,
- Providing input on subdivision or development proposals, and
- Other community development projects.

The commission is your best source of information on land use planning issues. You will work closely with them throughout your time on council.

Alberta Planning Board

The Alberta Planning Board plays an important role in the provincial planning system. Established by the *Planning Act* and appointed by the provincial government, the board decides on:

- Subdivision applications,
- Regional plan issues, and
- Inter-municipal disputes.

More information

This is only a brief description of some of the more common planning expressions. Your best sources for detailed information are your improvement district manager or your regional planning commission. There are also a number of publications on land use planning in Alberta.

Available from your
regional planning
commission

- Make Planning Work for You brochures
 - Planning Your Community
 - Development
 - Subdivision
 - Joint Land Ownership
- Planning and the Law: A Citizen's Guide

Available from
Alberta Municipal Affairs
Edmonton
(427-2225)

- Managing Community Planning
A 15 minute film on Alberta's land use planning system
- Orientation programs for development appeal boards and municipal planning commissions
- Energy Management for Municipalities
Resource kits on energy sensitive land use planning and reducing municipal energy costs

APPENDIX 1

COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

AAAB	Alberta Assessment Appeal Board
AAAF	Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen
AADC	Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation
AAMD&C	Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
AC	Advisory Council
AMA	Alberta Municipal Affairs
AMHC	Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation
APEGGA	Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysists of Alberta
APF	Alberta Planning Fund
ASB	Agricultural Service Board
ASP	Area Structure Plan
AUMA	Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
B/R	Budget Report
CCITF	Consolidated Cash Investment Trust Fund
CER	Current Expenditure Refund
CER	Current Expenditure Refund
CR	Capital Reserve
CR	Court of Revision
CT	Certificate of Title
CTAP	Community Tourism Action Plan
DAB	Development Appeal Board
DPO	Direct Purchase Order
EA	Equalized Assessment
EDP	Electronic Data Processing
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EP&PL	Electric Power and Pipeline
ERCB	Energy Resources Conservation Board
ERDA	Economic and Regional Development Agreement
F&A	Finance and Administration
FCC	Farm Credit Corporation
FCSS	Family and Community Support Services
FLAW	Forestry, Lands and Wildlife
FMA	Forest Management Agreement
G/L	General Ledger
GD	Grazing Lease (detailed)
GILT	Grants-in-Lieu of Taxes
HLU	Hamlet Land Use
ID	Improvement District

APPENDIX 1 COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

IDA	Improvement District Act
II	Industrial Improvement
IR	Indian Reserve
ITT	Industrial Tax Transfer
LAEA	Local Authorities Election Act
LGAA	Local Government Administrators Association
LGSD	Local Government Services Division
LIT	Local Improvement Taxes
LUO	Land Use Order
M&E	Machinery & Equipment
MGA	Municipal Government Act
MO	Ministerial Order
MPC	Municipal Planning Commission
MR	Mill Rate
MSO	Municipal Services Officer
MTA	Municipal Taxation Act
NADC	Northern Alberta Development Council
NSD	Northlands School Division
OC	Order in Council
PFRA	Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act
PO	Purchase Order
PTOAG	Public Transportation Operating Assistance Grant
PWSS	Public Works Supplies and Service
RCSSD	Roman Catholic Separate School District
RDA	Rural Districts Act
REDC	Regional Economic Development Council
REHP	Rural Emergency Home Program
RHAP	Rural Home Assistance Program
RIDAA	Rural and Improvement District Association of Alberta
ROI	Return on Investment
SRA	Surface Rights Act
SRB	Surface Rights Board
T/R	Tax Recovery
TL	Titled Land
VSI	Veterinary Services Incorporated
W&T	Works and Transmissions

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